

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Encourages U.S. Business to Invest in Iraq

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is calling on American companies to seize business opportunities in Iraq as an investment in a “major civilian commitment” to the country’s future.

“President Obama and I and our government believe strongly that expanding economic opportunity is as essential as building democratic institutions,” Clinton said in remarks June 3 at the State Department. She addressed a business forum promoting commercial opportunities in Iraq, where business leaders joined U.S. and Iraqi government officials to discuss economic development across the country.

She said it’s particularly important “for people going through the changes that are sweeping the region and that Iraq has, in many ways, been a leader in demonstrating, to believe and to see that democracy delivers.”

The secretary said enhancing economic opportunity takes a “very important partnership” between the government and business community. She said businesses “create jobs, provide livelihoods, increase standards of living, give hope to individuals and their families.” Clinton said the government’s role in this effort should be to create the conditions for investment and growth that “will be broadly spread” and to generate a “ladder of economic opportunity for those willing to work hard, to acquire the education and skills required in the modern world.”

She said the United States is entering a new phase in its relationship with Iraq, and stands ready to commit civilian experts to work with their Iraqi counterparts and fellow Americans looking to start businesses around the country.

Clinton underscored the advantages of investing in Iraq, noting the International Monetary Fund’s projection that the country will grow faster than China during the next two years.

“Iraqis are looking to rebuild every sector of their economy — not only their oil sector, but agribusiness, transportation, housing, banking and many others,” she said.

The secretary also said Iraq has one of the best-educated workforces in the region.

However, Clinton said, security and infrastructure

challenges remain, as well as the threat of corruption. She commended Iraqis for working to make it easier to do business in Iraq for Iraqis and foreign investors alike.

She said the United States wants to encourage American businesses to begin weighing the costs and benefits of investing in Iraq, and the U.S. government will do everything in its power to support that process. Clinton said the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the departments of Treasury, Energy and Agriculture are ready to team with U.S. embassies and consulates to “support commercial activity in every region of Iraq.”

The secretary said the United States wants “to see Iraq have a strong democracy and a growing economy that provides stability and prosperity for the Iraqi people,” and said the United States needs to work to ensure investments are in place to help Iraq chart its future. She commended U.S. Ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey for his efforts in working to establish an American Chamber of Commerce in Iraq.

Clinton urged Iraq to take full advantage of the talents of women in the workforce, and said the United States “stands ready to be a good partner” and to encourage “in every way.”

U.S., Colombia Cooperate on Development, Energy, Education

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says U.S. and Colombian officials have had a “very productive and wide-ranging dialogue” on issues ranging from human rights and economic development to educational exchanges and environmental protection.

Clinton spoke after meeting with Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Holguin May 31 in Washington. She said the United States has been “impressed and inspired” by Colombia’s progress in becoming a leader in the Western Hemisphere, adding that U.S. and Colombian leaders are eager to expand joint work to address common challenges and to reach shared goals.

Holguin thanked the United States for working with Colombia to fight terrorism and drug trafficking, and said her country is now ready to tackle a wide range of social and economic development issues, such as energy, education, science and technology and the environment.

Clinton commended the country for working to consolidate democratic freedoms and promote human rights, and said Colombia has “emerged as a regional and global partner.” The secretary said the South American

nation is playing an important role in international security by participating in the United Nations Security Council, and through its work training police to help 16 other countries meet their own safety and defense challenges.

Clinton and Holguin led their respective delegations during the second U.S.-Colombia High-Level Partnership Dialogue, which the State Department said broadens the bilateral relationship "as an authentic partnership in which both countries cooperate to advance inclusive prosperity, democracy, citizen safety, energy and many other issues of mutual interest."

In a May 31 news release, the State Department said the meeting was broken down into five working groups, consisting of energy; environmental protection and climate change; democracy, human rights and good governance; social and economic opportunities; and culture and education.

Clinton said the officials worked to expand their partnership on fossil fuels and clean energy, and will work to find new ways to expand development without increasing carbon dioxide emissions. She expressed support for Colombia's national development plan, noting the United States supports inclusive social and economic development as an "impressive investment." The secretary said talks also covered how each country can expand access to education, preserve ancient cultures, improve English proficiency and optimize people-to-people exchanges.

Clinton said the U.S.-Colombian relationship is "on a solid foundation, but has the opportunity to become so much more" to benefit the people of both countries. She said the United States "has a lot to learn" from Colombia, and U.S. leaders "look forward to the opportunities that this partnership dialogue provides to do just that."

U.S. Condemns "Senseless" Violence in Yemen

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration condemned attacks against President Ali Abdullah Saleh's compound in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a as "senseless acts of violence," and said the country's political unrest must be resolved through negotiation.

In a June 3 statement, White House press secretary Jay Carney said the United States condemns the violence "in the strongest terms," and he called on all sides to immediately cease hostilities and "pursue an orderly and peaceful process of transferring political power," as called for in an agreement brokered by Yemen's neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"Violence cannot resolve the issues that confront Yemen, and today's events cannot be a justification for a new round of fighting," Carney said. "We urge all sides to heed the wishes of the Yemeni people, whose aspirations include peace, reform, and prosperity."

According to press reports, Saleh's presidential compound in Sana'a suffered a severe attack June 3, and Yemeni officials told media outlets that the president was wounded and is currently in a hospital. Clashes between Yemeni security forces and tribal groups have also occurred in many other areas of the capital.

President Obama sent John Brennan, his assistant for counterterrorism and homeland security, to discuss the situation in Yemen with officials in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. According to Carney, Brennan and his Saudi and Emirati counterparts expressed deep concern at the "deteriorating situation throughout Yemen."

"Brennan said that the United States would continue to coordinate closely with both governments on developments in Yemen in an effort to help bring an end to the violence," Carney said.

The White House's principal deputy press secretary, Josh Earnest, told reporters traveling with President Obama June 3 that the Obama administration condemns the violence committed by both the pro- and anti-government forces, and repeated U.S. calls for President Saleh to accept the GCC's proposal for a peaceful political transition.

"We hope that there will be and that there should be a negotiated settlement in Yemen, and that we believe that President Saleh should sign the agreement transferring power," Earnest said.

New York Meeting Focuses on Children and HIV/AIDS

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Close to 17 million children worldwide have lost a parent to the AIDS epidemic. About 100 representatives of governments and international organizations are meeting in New York City June 3-4 to find ways to help these youngsters cope with the many economic, social and health problems that can worsen the trauma of a parent's illness or death.

UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have convened the meeting of the Global Partners Forum to focus on increasing children's access to social services and HIV prevention, treatment and care services. Participants will

also be trying to increase the impact of aid dollars devoted to these programs.

Children in families living with HIV/AIDS contend with problems far beyond their years. They may provide care for a parent in declining health; they may struggle with household economic problems because a wage-earning parent is sick. Without a parent as a protector, they may fall victim to abuse or be forced into sexual activity, which can make them susceptible to HIV exposure.

"To help these children reach their full potential," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, "we urgently need to invest in national social protection programs that fight poverty and stigma, and which address the special needs of HIV-affected families."

PEPFAR was first launched in 2003 with a goal to provide support and assistance to children affected by the disease either directly or through their families and communities. In its first five years, PEPFAR provided care to 4 million orphans and vulnerable children. PEPFAR moved into its second phase in 2009 with a renewed goal to give care to 5 million children and to provide HIV prevention and education to 100 percent of those children in nations with a generalized epidemic.

"The U. S. government is the largest supporter of programs targeting orphans and vulnerable children, and we remain firm in our commitment," said Ambassador Eric Goosby, U.S. global AIDS coordinator. "Failure to address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children will have a long-term impact on both individuals and society."

The recommendations that emerge from the Global Partners Forum will be presented at the U.N. High Level Meeting on AIDS, June 8-10 in New York. Member states are expected to reaffirm their commitments to addressing the disease and sustaining the global AIDS response.

Arabs Dedicated to Democracy Talk with Election Monitor

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Veteran election observer Omar Kader is proud of Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. As he sees it, though, toppling dictators is only one step in a process that will lead to democracy.

"After your revolution, the youth thought they had won something, when in fact the work just began," Kader said. "You have got a lot of work ahead of you; don't drop it now."

On May 31, Kader spoke with Arabs about the importance of monitoring elections and its role in

democracy during a webcast held at the U.S. State Department. Kader, who has monitored elections for 25 years in the Arab world and Asia, said everyone is equal at the ballot box.

"The most important thing that you can remember is that every voter is equal, every vote is the same," Kader said. "If a millionaire comes in to vote, or a poor illiterate woman comes in to vote, they are each one vote. One is not more important than the other."

From serving as an elections monitor for the Carter Center, Democracy International and the National Democratic Institute, Kader knows that conducting and monitoring elections is no easy task. To better grasp the process, Kader recommends the Handbook for European Union Election Observation (PDF, 1.3MB) and "Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy," by Eric C. Bjornlund.

"For those of you that want to really get involved, you have got to do it with knowledge," Kader said. "Most people don't read the election laws, most people don't know how they work, so equip yourself with a good bit of knowledge."

Elections monitoring, Kader said, originated in the Philippines, not in Europe or the United States. After political turmoil in the 1980s, Filipinos created a process to ensure that elections would be free and fair. Kader said Americans and Europeans learned from the Philippines about how to better involve the citizenry to observe elections.

While democracies should share principles like transparency, protecting minorities and holding regularly scheduled elections, Kader said the manner in which elections are conducted differs from country to country. In fielding a question from Tunisia, Kader said American-style elections and democracy may not suit Tunisians.

"There is no right. There is only a Tunisian way to do it for Tunisia," Kader said. "If you came and looked at our democracy and our constitution and our rules, there are a lot of things you may not like about it. Well, you don't have to have them."

Kader said political parties often train volunteers to work at polling stations and to act as observers. He stressed that it is imperative that observers and polling station workers remain impartial during the voting process.

"Being an election monitor, you have to volunteer and commit yourselves to being totally neutral and fair while you are monitoring," Kader said. "You cannot advocate while you are an election monitor. ... Your goal is to make sure that the election is free and open and goes by the

law.”

Setting up a wide-scale election can take up to two years and involves pre-election, election and post-election phases. Pre-election includes drafting or amending election laws and mapping voting districts; the election entails poll station set-up and ballot counting; and post-election focuses on reporting and analysis.

On election day, observers go into action early and work until the next day in some cases. At the polling station, monitors locate and inspect ballot boxes, check registration procedures and make sure voters can cast their ballots in private.

“You take a look at the ballots to make sure that no one has tampered with them, make sure they have been secured, make sure the ballot box is secured,” Kader said. “You go through a tick list and the tick list is anywhere from 15 to 25 questions you ask them, and then, as soon as they begin the voting, you run to the next polling station and you ask the same questions.”

With the ballots cast and results announced, monitors draft reports for dissemination and discussion so issues can be addressed to improve future elections.

Kader said as democracy emerges in places like Egypt and Tunisia, enhancements will take place in the economy, society and culture.

“Your education system will become more competitive. You will have global jobs, not just local jobs,” Kader said.

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